

Massachusetts Department of Higher Education
Expedited Program Review Detailed Instructions

Not all institutions are eligible for this process. See the [Expedited Program Review template](#) for eligibility criteria.

Step 1: Institution: Complete the External Review Template. The application is submitted electronically; no paper copy is needed. As part of completing the application, you will need to:

A. File Articles of Amendment with the Massachusetts Secretary of State

The Secretary's Office can be contacted at corpinfo@sec.state.ma.us or 617-727-7030. Explain that you seek to file Articles of Amendment to your charter, and you will be directed to the proper staff member and application depending on whether you are a domestic nonprofit or LLC. For domestic nonprofits, the amendment expands Article II, the purpose of the corporation; for LLCs, the amendment expands part 3, the general character of the business. **In either case, please make sure to name each proposed degree specifically, e.g., Bachelor of Science in Business, Master of Arts in Education.**

As of October 1, 2014, the fee charged by the Secretary's Office was \$15. Please include a pdf of the date-stamped copy of your filing with your application.

B. Choose an external evaluator team

The Expedited Program Review includes an evaluation of the proposed program by a review team of two external evaluators. Review teams are proposed by the institution, but must be approved by the Department of Higher Education (DHE). Following are the standards by which the DHE assesses the review team's qualifications to conduct the program evaluation:

1. Review teams have advanced scholarship in the field, a terminal degree, and substantial leadership experience (e.g. Dean, Director, Chair, etc). Review teams have credentials and extensive professional experience in college-level teaching, research, or administration within institutions of higher education similar to the institution whose program is being reviewed. Industry leaders and professionals and practitioners from appropriate fields may also be included on review teams.
2. Reviewers have a disinterested professional commitment to the review process and to the task of rendering objective findings and recommendations based upon empirical evidence and informed judgments.
3. No person shall serve on a review team who has a present or recent, official or unofficial connection with the institution or program under review or who the DHE has reason to believe has independent or financial interest in the DHE's final decision.

C. ALTERNATE: Professional Program Accreditation

In lieu of the external evaluator team, the DHE will accept program-specific accreditation by a professional accrediting agency approved by the U.S. Department of Higher Education if (1) the DHE determines that the standards and processes of the professional accrediting agency are as rigorous as those in 610 CMR 2.00, and (2) the accrediting agency determines that the institution has the appropriate status to begin advertising the program, recruiting students, and accepting applications from prospective students. NEASC Substantive Change accreditation may also substitute for the external evaluator report, provided it addresses the program the institution seeks to add.

If you believe that the timing and standards of your relevant accrediting agency may fit these criteria, complete Section J (page 4) of the Application Template rather than choosing an external evaluator team.

Step 2: DHE: Confirm the application is complete.

The DHE will send an email confirming receipt of the application, generally within 1-2 business days, and then about a week later a second email stating whether the information in the application is complete, and if not, what additional information is needed. This email will also include the application fee invoice.

Step 3: Institution: Pay invoice and, if needed, provide additional information.

Step 4: DHE: Send Notice-to-Proceed

Within 30 business days of receiving the complete application, including the payment of the application fee, the DHE will respond in writing regarding:

- A. **Approval of Evaluators:** The letter will state either that (1) the proposed evaluators are approved, and the institution may proceed with its review, or (2) the institution needs to submit alternates evaluators. The approval letter will also include the Charge to the Evaluation Committee.
- B. **On-site or Remote Program Review:** To the maximum extent possible, reviews by external evaluators will be conducted remotely, with site visits limited to programs that (1) require new facilities, labs, equipment, or instrumentation; (2) significantly depart from the institution's stated mission and objectives; or (3) receive an external evaluator report stating that the program cannot be adequately assessed remotely. Institutions that would like a site visit by the external evaluator team are free to arrange one, even if it is not required by the DHE.
- C. (If applicable) **Professional Program Accreditation in lieu of External Evaluator Review:** If you are seeking to substitute program-specific accreditation for external evaluation, this email will state whether the proposed accrediting agency has been approved.

Step 5: Institution: Begin the external evaluation.

Once the DHE has approved the proposed evaluation team, the institution will arrange for the evaluators to undertake the review, and provide them with the DHE Charge to the Evaluation Committee and any other information the evaluators may request.

Step 6: Evaluators: Submit the evaluators' report.

Evaluators should use the Charge to the Evaluation Committee, which includes program review criteria from 610 CMR 2.08 (See Appendix A), in making their recommendation on the proposed program. The evaluation committee may request to speak with DHE staff if guidance is needed in interpreting these criteria. Evaluators may submit one joint report, or two separate reports. The Evaluators' Report(s) should 1) include an assessment of how well the institution fulfills the review criteria, 2) make recommendations to the institution for improving the proposed program, and 3) advise the DHE on whether the program should be approved.

Once the report has been completed, DHE will pay an honorarium to each evaluator of \$750 for remote program reviews and \$1,250 for on-site program reviews. In the case of site visits, institutions are responsible for covering the transportation, accommodation, and food costs of the evaluation team.

Step 7: Institution: Submission to the Department

Within 40 business days of receiving the external evaluators' report(s), the institution will submit to the DHE the report(s) and the institution's response.

Step 8: DHE: Decision to Approve or Deny

The DHE will respond in writing within 30 business days stating that: (1) the program is approved, or (2) program approval is denied. In the event that the two external reviewers submit conflicting reports on the program, the DHE may bring in a third external reviewer of its choice prior to issuing its decision.

Institutions with programs approved through the Expedited Program Review process may begin to advertise the program and enroll students after receiving written approval. Institutions with programs denied through the Expedited Program Review process may appeal the decision to the BHE in writing within 30 business days.

Please don't hesitate to contact the Department of Higher Education at programreview@bhe.mass.edu with any questions you have about this process, or suggestions on how it might be improved.

APPENDIX A: 610 CMR 2.08 (3), CRITERIA FOR NEW PROGRAMS

(a) **General.** When an existing Massachusetts-based institution which is accredited without sanction by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges is being reviewed by Board as part of its request for a change in degree-granting authority, the criteria which guide the review are the standards currently utilized by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges, supplemented by the criteria below.¹

(b) **False Advertising.** An institution may not advertise a degree program or credit offerings or enroll students in a degree program or courses for credit before the Board has approved the program or credit offerings if the latter are outside the present degree authorization of the institution.

(c) **Specificity Degree-granting authority,** as vested in the institution, shall be appropriate to the mission and purpose of the institution and shall be reasonably specific (for example, "Bachelor of Science in Nursing," "Master of Arts in Religious Education," "Associate in Arts in Liberal Arts," "Doctor of Philosophy in Mathematics").

(d) **Faculty.** All faculty members shall hold proper credentials, and their preparation and qualifications must be suited to the field and level of their instructional assignments. Those in the conventional academic fields shall hold degrees or present evidence of scholarship or creative achievement appropriate to their positions; those in the professional, technical, or specialized fields shall have equally appropriate education, preparation, experience, and attainments. When an existing institution proposes to extend its degree-granting authority, the following are the minimum expected academic or professional qualifications of the instructional faculty associated with the proposed new degree program:

a. An institution proposing to add a new degree at the associate's level shall ensure that at least one full-time faculty member teaching in the proposed program holds at least a master's degree, or equivalent experience and/or attainment, in an appropriate field.

b. An institution proposing to add a new degree at the baccalaureate level shall ensure that at least one full-time faculty member teaching in the proposed program holds a doctoral or other terminal degree, or equivalent experience and/or attainment, in an appropriate field.

c. An institution proposing to add a new degree program at the master's or post-master's level shall ensure that at least two-thirds of the full-time faculty teaching in the proposed program hold a doctoral or other terminal degree, or equivalent experience and/or attainment, in an appropriate field.

d. An institution seeking to add a new program at the doctoral level shall ensure that all faculty teaching in the program hold a doctoral or other terminal degree, or equivalent experience and/or attainment, in an appropriate field.

(e) **Leadership.** The governing board of the institution shall organize and govern itself in accordance with a set of bylaws. The bylaws shall provide specific regulation of membership, term of office, responsibilities, definitions of conflict of interest, and provisions

¹ The Charge to the Evaluation Team will highlight the relevant NEASC standards for a given review.

concerning prohibitions or limitations on financial dealings between trustees and the institution.

(f) **Financial Stability** If an institution knows that it may close, or if it is planning to merge with another institution, it shall so notify the Board and should follow appropriate procedures as far as possible in advance of the closure or merger, including filing appropriate documents with the Office of the Secretary of State; and it shall arrange, in association with the Board to safeguard the needs of students by organizing educational transfer opportunities, and ensuring the preservation of student records, as required by M.G.L. c. 69, § 31B.

In addition, undergraduate degree programs must meet the minimal number of general education credits, as noted below in **610 CMR 2.07 (3)(c) 2: General Education:**

2. General Education.

a. Each undergraduate degree program shall include a general education requirement, together with a major or concentration requirement in an academic discipline or interdisciplinary area. An associate's degree shall comprise a minimum of 60 credits, and a baccalaureate degree a minimum of 120 credits. All courses offered for credit toward graduation shall be college level. Remedial courses, or courses offered to prepare students for college-level work, may only be offered for institutional credit.

b. General education shall comprise a balance of courses of study drawn from each of the main disciplinary areas: the arts and humanities, including literature and foreign languages; mathematics and the natural and physical sciences; and the social sciences. The following are the minimum general education requirements:

Associate in Applied Science degree: 16 credit hours

Associate in Science degree: 20 credit hours

Associate in Arts degree: 33 credit hours

Baccalaureate degree: 36 credit hours